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ABSTRACT

The moral judgments of 22 parochial school second graders and 20 public school children of similar age and intelligence were compared in this study. The children were read 12 moral judgment stories of either negative intention and positive consequence or positive intention and negative consequence. Story content included either damage to personal property, damage to the property of others, or physical damage to others. Analysis of variance revealed that public and parochial school children differed on their judgments of the story characters as a function of story content. In general, parochial students made more intention-based judgments than did public school children, "p" < .001. This tendency was especially evident in stories involving damage to others, with negative outcomes, "p" < .05, and with negative intent and positive consequence stories involving personal property damage, "p" < .05, and damage to the property of others, "p" < .01. The data indicate that both environmental influences and the situational story context influence moral judgments. It is suggested that the group "belongingness" of the parochial school may account for the greater use of intention by these children. (Author/MP)

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Moral Judgments in Parochial and Public School Second-Graders

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Running Head: Moral Judgments and Parochial Schools

Abstract

This study compared the moral judgments of 22 parochial school second-graders and 20 public school children of similar age and intelligence. The children were read 12 moral judgment stories of either positive consequence and negative intention or negative intention and positive consequence. Story content included either damage to personal property, damage to the property of others, or physical damage to others. Analysis of variance revealed that public and parochial school children differed on their judgments of the story characters as a function of story content. In general parochial students made more intention-based judgments than did public school children, $p < .001$. This tendency was especially evident in stories involving damage to others, with negative outcomes, $p < .05$, and with negative intent and positive consequence stories involving personal property damage, $p < .05$, and damage to the property of others, $p < .01$. The data indicate that both environmental influences and the situational story context influence moral judgments. It is suggested that the group belongingness of the parochial school may account for the greater use of intention by these children.

Moral Judgments in Parochial and Public School Second-Graders

The issue of training vs. maturation has been consistently raised with respect to Piagetian constructs. Within the framework of moral reasoning Piaget (1932) acknowledges that "there is no doubt that by adopting a certain technique with their children, parents can succeed in making them attach more importance to intentions" (p. 137). Although several studies have focused on direct training of moral judgments (Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Gruseck, Saas-Kirtsaak, & Simutis, 1978; Turiel, 1966), few studies have focused on the larger social context of the child within a culture.

One particular context of interest involves the parochial school for which the training of morality is paramount. Research to date has yielded conflicting findings on the effect of parochial school attendance. Boehm (1962), using Piagetian stories, compared the development of conscience in children attending either Catholic school or public school in New York State. Boehm found that parochial school children, regardless of socioeconomic status or intelligence level, produced more mature moral judgment responses than did the public school children. Boehm's findings were later corraborated by Baldwin and Baldwin (1970). Armsby (1971), however, criticized Boehm's findings on methodological grounds. Armsby argued that the traditional Piagetian stories emphasized obedience (a characteristic highly salient to the Catholic school system) rather than intentionality. After controlling for obedience, Armsby

reported no differences between Catholic and public school children in the ability to make intention-based judgments. Whiteman and Kosier (1964) did not find morality to be related to Sunday school attendance, although ungraded classrooms appeared to enhance moral reasoning.

The issue of the influence of religious training on the development of intention-based moral judgments has not been adequately resolved. It seems a reasonable hypothesis to suggest that an atmosphere which stresses "morality" would enhance Piagetian moral reasoning and yet the relationship between moral reasoning and general cognitive growth may put limits upon the influence of that training. This study is an attempt to update this literature and to examine any interactive effects between type of school attended and story contexts.

Method

Subjects. The final sample consisted of 22 parochial school and 20 public school second graders (mean age = 7.8 years). The parochial school children were attending the Living Word Academy, a program under the auspices of the Church of Christ. The public school children comprised a classroom in a school district which, in the opinion of the principals, was similar in socioeconomic status. The public school sample consisted of 13 girls and 7 boys, whereas 18 girls and 4 boys were in the parochial school sample. Since no gender effects were found in subsequent analyses, the inequality of groups on gender was not considered to be a crucial factor.

Moral Reasoning Assessment. The moral judgment stories used in this study were adaptations of the traditional Piagetian format utilizing only a single story but varying the type of intention and consequences across stories. The twelve stories included six with positive intentions and negative consequences and six with negative intentions and positive consequences. The content of the stories involved either damage of personal property, damage to the property of others, or injury to another person. Two stories of each type were included to eliminate possible single story effects.

Two-frame cartoon-like drawings depicting the story action were presented in conjunction with the reading of the stories. Children's judgments of the main story character were made via an 8-point rating scale. The scale was a two-dimensional bar graph representing 4 degrees of good (colored black) and 4 degrees of bad (colored red).

Procedure. Each child participated individually in an interview that lasted approximately 25 minutes. Children were tested by one of four female examiners in a room adjacent to the child's classroom.

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was administered first to all children. Following this, the twelve moral judgment stories were read to each child. Prior to the introduction of the first story, children were familiarized with the rating scale. The stories were presented to the children in one of six random orders. Each story was read at least twice to the child. Following the second reading the child was asked "What do you think about the child in the story?" and "Is the child

good or bad?" The child was also asked the reasons for the judgment and requested to indicate on the scale how bad or good the story character was. If the child needed to hear the story again, it was repeated.

Group matching. In order to control for age and IQ levels, the two groups of subjects were matched on these variables. This matching procedure yielded comparable samples for the 22 parochial and 20 public school children in the final sample. The average ages were 96.2 months (s.d. = 3.42) and 96.3 months (s.d. = 4.10) for the parochial and public school children respectively. Peabody test scores for the parochial students averaged 106.1 (s.d. = 11.41) whereas the average stood at 105.3 (s.d. = 9.35) for the public schoolers. It should be noted that this post-hoc procedure was used to minimize disruption of the child's school day and that the matching was performed prior to analysis of the moral judgment data. This procedure resulted in the omission from analysis of the scores of four parochial and two public school children.

Results

Analysis of covariance with repeated measures was used as the basic analysis technique with the experimenter serving as a covariate. Analysis revealed a significant type of intention type of school interaction, F (1, 40) = 12.21, $p < .001$, with scores grouped by intention. Overall, children tended to judge on the basis of intention, F (1, 40) = 14.77, $p < .0005$, but this trend was due primarily to the responding of the parochial

school children. Individual comparisons via Tukey tests showed that no differences as a function of intention were present in the public schoolers, but the parochial school children rated the positive intention stories significantly higher than the negative intention stories, q (40) = 7.34, $p < .001$ (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Analysis computed on the children's ratings of the characters in the six story types revealed a significant story type x type of school interaction, F (5,200) = 7.64, $p < .0001$, as well as a significant story main effect, F (5,200) = 13.95, $p < .0001$ (see Table 2). In these stories the parochial school sample appears to give more intention-based judgments when the context involves damage to the property of others, q (200) = 9.64, $p < .01$ and damage to a person, q (200) = 8.34, $p < .01$. Although mean differences suggest a trend in the same direction for stories involving personal property damage, Tukey tests showed this difference to be nonsignificant. In these contexts, the parochial school children rated the positive intention characters more positively than the negative intention characters. Public school children showed no significant differences in their ratings of the positive intention/negative consequence stories and the negative intention/positive consequence stories in any of the contexts.

Insert Table 2 about here

In several story contexts comparisons between the two school groups were significant. On stories with negative intentions and positive consequences, the public school children tended toward more consequence-based judgments than did the parochial students in the contexts of damage to personal property, q (40) = 4.08, $p < .05$ and the damage to other's property, q (40) = 4.58, $p < .01$. On stories with positive intentions and negative consequences, only in the damage to person stories was the difference between parochial and public school children significant, q (40) = 4.18, $p < .05$. On this story type, parochial second graders appear once again to be more intention-based in their judgments.

Discussion

The data suggest that across a number of story contexts parochial school children tend to produce more intention-based judgments than public school children. Thus the data appear to give support to the findings of Boehm (1962) with a revision of methodology and a different religious denomination. The data suggest that moral judgments are significantly affected by the child's environment. It is important to note, however, that the particular aspects of the environment accounting for these differences need to be investigated through additional research.

It might be suggested that the specific training of the parochial school has the major effect. Boehm argued that Catholicism's lack of differentiation between intended acts and actual acts led to the greater use of intention. The schooling per se, however, may not be

the only reason. Home environments and parental training have not been controlled and certainly the home atmosphere of parents who elects to send their child to a religious-oriented school may be relevant.

Another hypothesis is also possible, however. It suggests that the school's or family's function in developing a sense of comradeship or a feeling of group belonginess may be critical. The moral judgments of the public school children (which are somewhat consequence-based), might be classified as Stage 2 in Kohlberg's (1969) scheme of morality. According to Kohlberg, movement into Stage 3 requires recognition of the larger social milieu. Implied here is the awareness of intentions. More of the parochial school children may be operating on this level. For Kohlberg (1978) the awareness of maintaining and supporting a social group is essential for "Stage 3" thinking in that judgments are related to the social order. Durkheim (1925/1961) also emphasizes the importance of group cohesiveness to the development of morality and socialization. Furthermore, he suggests that religious minorities appear to have stronger bonds of solidarity and a shared value structure, both of which are important to the development of morality. Thus group solidarity, which may promote movement with Kohlberg's Stage 3, may also promote the use of intention within the Piagetian paradigm.

These concepts may provide an explanation for the apparent greater maturity of moral judgments in parochial school children. The group cohesiveness, which may be a product of attending a religious school,

might foster this maturity at this stage of development when conformity to social order is important. It should be noted that this hypothesis suggests that the specific religious values are not as important as the immersion in a common set of values (shared by parents and school) which promotes a feeling of group belongingness. Furthermore, although a parochial school setting appears to provide a framework of this group cohesiveness, other means to this end are possible.

Thus several explanations for the data are possible. Although differences in the children's judgments are found based on the type of school attended, it is important to note that these children may have also differed in home atmosphere and parental childrearing practices. The data do not suggest that religious training per se leads to faster rate of maturation in moral reasoning, only that second-graders in a religious-oriented school tend to exhibit more mature judgments than their public school counterparts. The research does suggest that the development of moral reasoning can be affected by environmental factors. One hypothesis which might account for the data suggests that group belonginess fostering a sense of commitment to society as well as exposure to ethical principles acts in the development of moral reasoning at this age level. Further research needs to consider what are the particular variables accounting for the differences found in this study, whether these differences continue to exist over time, and whether these differences generalize to differences in behavior.

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Table 1

Mean Story Character Ratings as a Function of Story Intention and School Type

	Story Type	
Intention	Positive	Negative
Consequence	Negative	Positive
School Type		
Parochial	4.93[a]	3.18*
Public	4.27	4.18

[a]Although analyses were performed on summed scores, tabular presentation adjusts the scores to reflect the rating scale used by the subjects.

*$p < .001$, significance level refers to Tukey comparison between story types.

Table 2

Mean Story Character Ratings as a Function

of Story Context and School Type

Intention	Positive			Negative		
Consequence	Negative			Positive		
Context	Personal Property	Other's Property	Damage to other	Personal Property	Other's Property	Damage to other
School Type						
Parochial	4.71[ab]	5.02	5.09	3.96	2.61	3.00
Public	4.13	4.70	3.98*	5.03*	3.83**	3.88

[a]Although analyses were performed on summed scores, tabular presentation adjusts the scores to reflect the rating scale used by the subjects.

[b]All significance levels refer to Tukey comparison between the two school types.

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$